

Advancing Trans-species Social and Spatial Justice through Critical Animal Geographies

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Towards Trans-species Social and Spatial Justice through Critical Animal Geographies, Anarchist Praxis and a Total Liberation ethic.

“I am vegan because I have compassion for animals; I see them as beings possessed of value not unlike humans. I am an anarchist because I have that same compassion for humans, and because I refuse to settle for compromised perspectives, half-assed strategies and sold-out objectives. As a radical, my approach to animal and human liberation is without compromise: total freedom for all, or else.”

(Dominick, 1997, n.p.)

Introduction

This chapter invites us to consider how critical animal geographies, anarchist praxis and a Total Liberation ethics offer a means of urging and ensuring a more just trans-species praxis, one which champions liberation and non-violent connections with all animals (human included). Matsuoka and Sorenson's (2018, p. 15) defined trans-species social justice as, "social justice beyond the limit of concern for human animals". It is important, however that “spatial” geographies of justice are also given due recognition: trans-species violence is always deeply embedded within time and space (see White and Springer, 2018). Thus, in addition to being critically attentive to the *why* of trans-species (non) violence, or (in)justice as other disciplines are, there is something of immeasurable value and significance to be gained by focusing on the "the *how* and *where* of violence" (Springer, 2011, 90). Such attention is urgently needed. For, if nothing else, the ongoing crises and precarity that dominate the Anthropocene epoch indicate with absolute clarity and certainty that “we are at a critical point for the human species in its relations with the rest of nature” (Cudworth and Hobden, 2018, p. 8)

The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, a contextual discussion on what is understood by a "critical" approach to animal studies and animal geographies will be given. This is intended elicit a better understanding and appreciation of what these related approaches bring to addressing the question of human and nonhuman animal injustice. The second section focuses more explicit on anarchist geographies as a way of envisaging, engaging and enacting critical animal geographies.

Given misrepresentations of anarchism in popular thought, a brief overview of anarchism and its connections to radical geographies and animal liberation movements is made. From this, emerging through anarchism's emphasis on anti-hierarchicalism, prefigurative praxis and intersectionality an appeal to a total Liberation ethics will be given. The final, third section mindful of the concept and approaches foregrounded in the chapter, sketches out some research themes that have the potential to make a particularly timely and relevant contribution to knowledge. These include focusing on political economy and the animal industrial complex; *doing* intersectionality, and trans-species education as direct action.

Critical Animal Studies and Critical Animal Geographies

“CAS, while scholarly, is opposed to much of what passes as scholarship and teaching in academia. It does not feign neutrality or disinterest, but rather [advances] an engaged scholarship that seeks to promote radical change.” (Nocella et.al. 2015, p. 9).

The beginnings of a consciously "critical" approach to animal studies emerged in the mid-2000s (Best et.al, 2007; Nocella et al, 2015). Within academia, Critical Animal Studies (CAS) emerged out of a small group of American scholar-activists' intense frustration and anger with the perceived limitations of animal studies (AS) and mainstream animal studies (MAS). Among the damning accusations levelled against MAS was its failure to produce scholarship that could challenge the routine exploitation, violence that billions of other animals experience through the actions of humans. One of the co-founders of CAS is Steve Best. Best went on to become of most prominent, outspoken and influential voices both within the nascent field of critical animal studies and across the landscape of animal rights and liberation in the decade that followed. It is for these reasons that it is important to reflect on how he articulated the need for an explicit "critical" animal scholarship to come to the fore:

Against MAS, CAS seeks to illuminate problems and pose solutions through vivid, concrete, and accessible language. It openly avows its explicit ethical and practical commitment to the freedom of well-being of all animals and to a flourishing planet. It opposes all forms of discrimination, hierarchy, and oppression as a complex of problems to be extirpated from the root, not sliced off at the branch. It supports civil disobedience, direct action, and economic sabotage. And it promotes bridge-building and alliance politics as the means to promote the large-scale social transformations that alone can free the continuum of animal life and the dynamic natural world from the elite's colonization and conquest and the building fires of global climate change". (Best, 2009, p.12-13)

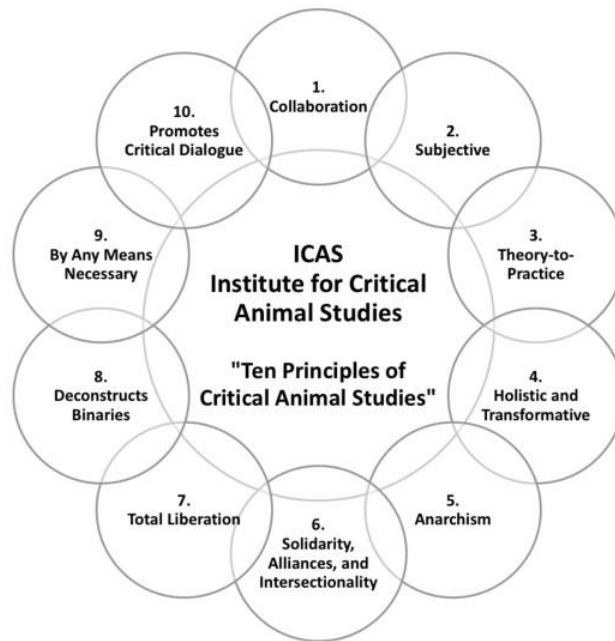
Before continuing it is acknowledge that the diversity of approaches within AS is such that the boundaries between MAS and CAS do blur at certain points. Indeed there will be some excellent 'critical' animal studies scholarship that is being pursued by researchers who see themselves as mainstream animal studies: (and indeed a similar scenario is repeated within between the boundaries of animal geographies and critical animal geographies/vegan anarchist geographies) and this is perfectly fine! As a rough indicator of whether research might be considered MAS or CAS, it is worth applying Pedersen and Stănescu's argument that CAS scholars shift the focus of attention away from exploring the animal "question", towards the animal "condition". They define the animal condition as follow:

[The] actual life situation of most nonhuman animals in human society and culture, as physically and emotionally experiences with its routine repertoire of violence, deprivation, desperation, agony, apathy, suffering, and death. ((2012, p. ix)

Or, as Taylor and Twine (2014, 1) conclude: "CAS seeks to differentiate itself from the broader AS [animal studies] field by having a direct focus on the circumstances and treatment of animals."

While fuzzy boundaries exists between aspects AS, MAS and CAS it is important to note that CAS is not reducible to either. There is a visible and defensible space which 'critical animal studies' is located, one which is reflected in the Ten Principles of CAS (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: "Ten Principles of Critical Animal Studies"



Source: Institute for Critical Animal Studies (2016, p3)

Two things are worth drawing attention to in this figure. First is the reference to *Ten Principles* (as opposed to Commandments). Critical Animal Studies is a complex, dynamic, unfolding space, which simultaneously rejects any dogmatic statement “thou must!” . In terms of challenging social injustice, CAS scholarship emphasises a need for both ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. As Pedersen and Stănescu (2014, p.264) have argued, “critical” entails both a position of engagement *and* an ongoing commitment:

For us, critical refers not only to engagement with critical theory, but equally a commitment to be critical of anything that purports to study animals and at the same time fails to engage, support, protect and stand with the animal herself. (emphasis in original)

This, positioning acts as a firm rebuttal of the notion that any person can be fully-signed up ‘card carrying’ CAS scholar. Recognition as a CAS scholar comes through the type of critical scholarship and the commitment to activism that is pursued.

A second important point to emphasise from the beginning is an openness to actively seek out and promoting dialogue with other critical discourses. As Best et al (2007, 2) argued it is only:

Through – and only through — new paradigms of ecopedagogy, bridge-building with other social movements, and a solidarity-based alliance politics, is it possible to build the new forms of consciousness, knowledge, social institutions that are necessary to dissolve the hierarchical society that has enslaved this planet for the last ten thousand years.

CAS in this sense draws great strength and verve from its diversity, and has been animated by a number of critical and intersectional perspectives. A number of critical and radical approaches run deeply within CAS. Anarchist praxis, for example has been highly influential (Nocella, et.al., 2015). Elsewhere other substantial interventions continue to draw on feminism (Kemmerer, 2011), ecofeminism (Adams, 1991) and animal ecofeminism (see also Corman and Vandrovcová, 2014). More recently, new disciplinary advances that have incorporated a CAS perspective include historical archaeology (Sayer and Uehlein, 2018; political science (Hamilton, 2018); and psychology (Hodson and Costello, 2018)

A clear desire running through the rich tapestries woven through CAS scholar-activist research has been to articulate and agitate more effectively for trans-species *social* justice. Yet, as Springer, (2012, 1593) rightly argues

"Social transformation is, of course, necessarily a spatial project, and a spatial dimension to the effective critique of existing structures is an important element of imagining and forging spaces for new ones."

With exceptions (e.g. Salter, 2015) it is the 'spatial' awareness; of the importance of interrogating the spaces and place where animal (ab)use occurs, that has largely been overlooked or underplayed within CAS scholarship (White and Springer, 2018). This is certainly a significant gap where critical animal geographers (CAG) are exceptionally well-placed to address. However,

before continuing further it is worth explaining might be understood by the “critical” in animal geography.

I have argued elsewhere (White 2015) that there are striking parallels between the call for a self-consciously critical animal studies to take root, and Wolch and Emel’s (1998, p. xi) impassioned plea for geographers to recognise the plight of nonhuman animals in their research:

The plight of animals worldwide has never been more serious than it is today. Each year, by the billions, animals are killed in factory farms; poisoned by toxic pollutants and waste; driven from their homes by logging, mining, agriculture, and urbanization; dissected, re-engineered, and used as spare body-parts; and kept in captivity and servitude to be discarded as soon as their utility to people has waned. The reality is mostly obscured by the progressive elimination of animals from everyday human experience, and by the creation of a thin veneer of civility surrounding human-animal relations, embodied largely by language tricks, isolation of death camps, and food preparation routines that artfully disguise the true origins of flesh-food. Despite the efforts made to minimize human awareness of animal lives and fates, however, the brutality of human domination over the animal world and the catastrophic consequences of such dominionism are everywhere evident.

This ‘critical’ intervention has been framed as part of a ‘third-wave’ of animal geographies. CAG is seen as being distinct from previous waves, where researchers often uncritically upheld and perpetuated dominant, speciesist, anthropocentric “human-animal” norms in their research approach and analysis (see Collard and Gillespie, 2017). Within CAS multiple, intersecting critical and radical geographies have begun to gather momentum and make significant contributions to this emerging, unfolding and dynamic ‘project’. Over the last two decades arguably the most prominent and important contributions here drawn on feminist approaches and analyses (see Birke, 2002). Some key themes here range from animal rights and feminist environmentalism (Seager, 2003); sex, gender and the commodification of other-than-human bodies (Gillespie, 2013); to exploring interspecies relation through intersectionality, performativity and standpoint (Hovorka, 2015). Other decisive interventions have come/ are coming from postcolonial feminist studies (e.g. Gaard, 2013) and critical feminist race scholars (Gunderman, 2018),

particularly Amie Breeze Harper (Harper, 2009, 2010). Another key radical geography: anarchism is also of increasing relevance here, and this will be focused on in more detail shortly.

To summarise, CAG place a strong emphases on the importance of spaces of justice/ injustice, paying close attention to "explore how violence depends in part on specific spatial arrangement... as critical animal geographies we are not only interested in the animal condition, but also in thinking about how 'the human' and 'the animal' are themselves social and spatial orders." (Collard and Gillespie, 2017, p. 10). A *critical* intervention into CAS scholarship can be seen in the way CAGs seek to encourage CAS scholars to focus greater attention on the question posed by Collard and Gillespie (2017, 8): "How can we more *justly* share space?" Moving forward a worthwhile area of research would be one that has the intention of building more robust bridges between CAS and CAG body/ies of literature, though taking up the challenge to of calling for trans-species social *and* spatial justice (White and Springer, 2018). It is in response to this that the chapter now makes a call for anarchist geographies and a total liberation ethic.

Anarchist Geographies and a Total Liberation Ethic

Anarchism has enjoyed great influential across many radical forms of protest and resistance movement that have fought for freedom and liberty for *all* life: human, nonhuman or the earth. This is certainly evident in contemporary social justice movement: indeed there has been a resurgence of anarchist thought and practice in recent decades. For example, in the late 1990s, Brian Dominick (1997, n.p.) argued that

“...many vegans and animal liberationists are being influenced by anarchist thought and its rich tradition. This is evidenced by growing hostility among some animal lib activists towards the statist, capitalist, sexist, racist and ageist Establishment which has been escalating the intensity of its war not only on non-human animals, but also on their human advocates. The relatively new community of animal liberationists is rapidly becoming aware of the totality of force which fuels the speciesist machine that is modern society. As such awareness increases, so should the affinity between animal liberationists and their more socially-oriented counterparts, the anarchists.

Unsurprisingly, anarchist approaches have enjoyed tremendous visibility within CAS, not least as both share a common commitment to "explore the origins and consequences of varied forms of inequality and hierarchy, and resolve to oppose them at every level." (Pellow, 2015, p. 2). This exciting and vibrant resurgence can also be seen within critical geography, which is increasingly "re-turning" toward anarchist thoughts and principles (Springer et al. 2012; Springer et al. 2016; de Souza et al, 2016; White et al. 2016). The emphasis on returning is important, as many students of the discipline are surprised to learn that the "beautiful geographies of anarchism" (Springer, 2016 1) were burning brightly well over a hundred years ago. This was particularly evident in the tremendous body/ies of work emerging from Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) and Élisée Reclus (1830-1905) (see Ferretti, 2017). Crucially both Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid*, 1902) and Reclus (*On Vegetarianism*, 1901) drew attention to the questions of inter-species justice and solidarity. Indeed as Clark and Martin, (2013, 7) note, Reclus's writings were intended to "prepare the way for a world in which all forms of domination - all "mastery" - would be abolished, so that humanity could live in a free community of equals founded on such a practice of active, engaged love and compassion".

Regrettably though many people – not least those within academia! - still instinctively recoil at the very mention of "anarchy" or "anarchism"; these terms conjuring up nihilistic riotous worlds of violence, chaos and disorder. Nothing, to reassure, could be further from the truth of what anarchists are, and what anarchism represents! While it is important to recognise that anarchism has embraced/ been embraced by other radical approaches, e.g. anarcho-feminism (Veron and White, forthcoming) anarchists differentiate and push beyond other critical and radical approaches in several ways. For example, anarchists consistently oppose and strive to dismantle "all systems and forms of archy (i.e, hierarchy, patriarchy, monarchy, adultarchy, oligarchy, anthroparchy, etc.)" (Springer, 2016, 43). As Bookchin (1989, p.271) notes:

"Above all, the anti-hierarchicalism that is associated with anarchism, particularly its move recently developed eco-anarchist forms, and its broader appeals to dominated people - women, ethnic groups, the elderly, and the dispossessed - rather than strictly to the proletariat, from the theoretical premises that cohere various tendencies, groups, and regionally based movements into a broad category that can be called 'new social movements'. The all-important conviction that freedom can be attained not merely if classes are abolished but if hierarchy in all its forms disappears brings ecology into accord with feminism and feminism into accord with a community conceived as a new ethical as well as functional dispensation of social life. The principle that unites these seemingly independent movements is the notion of participation and mutual aid - not only between municipalities but in the biosphere and between men and women."

The absence of *anarchy* opens up the possibilities for richer, more colourful and joyous lines of expressions of freedom and autonomy to emerge and flourish. To these ends anarchists advocate direct democracy, and ways organising that are non-hierarchical, non-coercive and non-violent, such as those seen through collectivism, volunteerism, and mutual aid (see Franks et.al. 2018). It is worth noting great many examples of how we conduct ourselves, and how we engage with other, is consistent with anarchist principles; it is certainly illustrated by many people who would not ordinarily consider themselves to be anarchist (see Parker et.al., 2020)!

A second way anarchists differ from other 'radical approaches' (e.g. Marxism) come through opposing the unhelpful ontological divide that seeks to separate 'theory/ reflection' on the one hand, and 'practice' on the other is. An anarchist approach seeks to dissolve this gap, fusing, binding and uniting theory and practice through an appeal to praxis. As de Souza (2016, p. 7) contends: "Theory is something politically crucial, provided it is intimately connected with practice in the context of praxis."

Another core anarchist concept is the appeal to a prefigurative praxis. Indeed, as Ince (2019, p.151) notes:

"(It) is the distinctively prefigurative underpinnings of anarchism that exert potentially the most powerful impact on academic endeavour. The notion that we must organize and relate to one another in ways that are reflective of the kind of future world we wish to create."

The emphasis on ‘we’ here is critical, insofar as it places a central emphasis on direct action in the here and now to address the injustice that we see in the/ our world. Anarchist and anarchist geographers argue that there is no waiting for the opportune or ideal moment to act in some undetermined future. Rather an anarchist praxis encourages a revolution of the everyday, one that is conscious, continuous and ongoing.

A radical commitment to intersectional praxis, animates an anarchist appeal for a unified ‘Total Liberation’ ethics (Anonymous, 2019) or ‘Total Liberation Ecology’ (Springer, forthcoming) to take root. In appealing for a politics of total liberation, Best (2014, xiii) refers:

“to the process of understanding human, animal, and earth liberation movements in relation to one another and building bridge around interrelated issues such as democracy and ecology, sustainability and veganism, and social justice and animal rights.... Human, animal and earth liberation movements are different components of one inseparable struggle – against hierarchy, domination and unsustainable social forms – not of which is possible without the others.”

Emphasising and extending many of these core points Pellow maintains that:

“...one cannot fully grasp the foundations of racism, classism, sexism, patriarchy, ageism, and ableism without also understanding speciesism and dominionism because they are all ideologies and practices rooted in hierarchy and the creation of oppositional superior and inferior subjects. This total liberation framework links oppression and privileges across species, ecosystems, and human populations, suggesting a theory and path toward justice and freedom – something missing in traditional models of intersectionality. Thus the concept of total liberation reveals both the complexity of various systems of hierarchy while also suggesting points of intervention, transformative change, solidarity and coalition building across myriad boundaries.” (Pellow, 2015, 2-3)

As critical animal geographers we would certainly include reference to a ‘spatial’ liberation as integral to this praxis.

Before contemplating future questions for researching it should be emphasised that one of the most important, and widely enacted forms of direct action that CAS, CAG scholar-activists embrace in their everyday lives is through veganism. Indeed a tremendously exciting new area of

CAG scholarship is currently coalescing around “Vegan Geographies” (see White et al., forthcoming). Certainly many anarchist have embraced a critical vegan praxis. Indeed the term “veganarchism” was coined by Brian Dominick in the mid-1990s. For Dominick (1997, n.p.) “veganism is the conscious abstinence from actions which contribute, directly or indirectly, to the suffering of sentient beings, be they animals or humans, for ethical reasons.” While mindful of different opportunities that present themselves, and my position as a UK citizen, I would argue the *where choice exists* then one of the great expressions of non-violence, of inter-species ‘anarchy in action’ is to be vegan. This not only is a statement of intent that rejects the intentional suffering of other animals for food or for their milk, but also acknowledges of the intrinsic violence, brutality and exploitation that humans endure when caught up in key spaces of animal violence, particularly the slaughterhouse or abattoir (White, 2018).

While many CAS/ CAG scholars embrace veganism as a core practice, there are obviously a great many other scholar-activists who might choose a different critical praxis, and who actively choose not to be vegan. I think many of us can name prominent individuals who certainly match this description; they engage in vital research and activism, but won’t ‘go there’ ie. go vegan. Personally speaking about those I am recalling here, I experience a profound disappointment, ‘how can you know what you know and still it’s not enough. As always, there is much to be potentially to gained in trying to seek common ground, and constructive engagement. It is also important that this is reflected in ‘our’ collective work, to think carefully about who we would like our audience to be, and how can we help raise consciousness through our teaching, research and writing that does allows us to maintain an open dialogue.

However, that said, engaging with academic communities who are indifferent or indeed hostile to the grounds upon which CAS/ CAG stands upon does not diminish or negate the need for spaces for explicitly CAS/ CAG scholars, activist and public communities to come together. I would encourage any researcher looking to become more involved with CAS/ CAG to look

engage with the North American Conference for Critical Animal Studies, Critical Geography Conference, Students for Critical Animal Studies, and the Conference of the European Association for Critical Animal Studies. As well as being welcoming and supportive great places to engage with others, they can also be vital in offering spaces of solidarity and support. This might be particularly important for those who find their CAS/ CAG research agendas are not reflected in their wider Department and/ or the find their commitment to veganism is not reflected or supported by their wider peer groups within and beyond the academy.

Ideas for Future Research and Scholarship Agendas

The influence of anarchism within inter-species social and spatial justice movements continues push back existing boundaries of knowledge and understanding in ever new and exciting ways. Committing to a research agenda that aims to raise consciousness and awareness about the plight of other animals can be an exhilarating and creative venture. There is such momentum and interested developing around CAS/ CAG generally, and vegan geographies specifically that it is an opportune time to think about how your research agenda can help continue developing and deepening this further into the future.

The emphasis made earlier placed on prefigurative praxis, on starting from where you are in the world, should be empowering when thinking about the 'where' of research. Thinking closely about your everyday lived realities, and how these are entangled with other trans-species relations and communities for example. How might these socio-spatial relationships through up ethical themes or questions, when considering geographies of justice/ injustice. In other words, research does not need to begin 'elsewhere' and involve 'others'. Rather, everywhere becomes a potentially important potential site of engagement, be it home, work, and university - and all those other key spaces in between!

There are many important research agendas that CAS, CAG and vegan anarchist geographies are pushing forward at this moment in time. I will just highlight three in particular. One of these certainly includes paying closer attention to better understand and articulate complex geographies of political economy more fully. How, for example does capitalism animate and operate - at all scales – within the animal industrial complex (A-IC)? The A-IC being understood here as:

“partly opaque and multiple set of networks and relationships between the corporate (agricultural) sector, governments, and public and private science. With economic, cultural, social and affective dimensions it encompasses an extensive range of practices, technologies, images, identities and markets. (Twine, 2012, pg.23)

How can a deeper understanding here apply to a Total Liberation ethics and the intent to transgress the ongoing commodification of life, and end these violent geographies (Anonymous, 2019)? How can we begin to better imagine, envisage and enact “post-capitalist” trans-species futures?

A second key line of research would be one focusing on intersectional geographies of activism within Total Liberation Movements. To talk about intersectionality and social justice is one thing, but how to take this out ‘on the streets’ often proves an intensely problematic area of contestation and conflict, and which often falls ways short of expectations (see Socha, forthcoming). How should Total Liberation activists/ vegan geographers, look to express solidarity with other social movements? In an interview with Mickey Z for World New Trust (2015) Amy Breeze Harper posed a number of searching questions; questions which are as relevant today as they were then: “How do veganism and #blacklivesmatter intersect? What does a vegan praxis of “black lives matter” look like? What does veganism that ignores “Black lives matter” look like, and what are the unintended consequences? Why do race and whiteness matter, and how do they operate within veganism and beyond?”

A third line of research would be to think about the importance of education - a central themes in anarchist geographies (see Suissa, 2019). There must be an unequivocal belief (else what's the point in writing and reading this chapter, or of undertaking research at all) that raising consciousness toward can be a catalyst for change. As the anarchist Peter Marshall (1989, p. 141) said:

“It is our consciousness which sets us free. Because consciousness is intentional we can become aware of and understand the influences at work on us... Between ourselves and the world, there is a gap in which we can say 'no'.”

How can therefore think about speaking and writing as key forms of direct action, and improve the relevance, impact and effectiveness of these? The act of encouraging people to think about trans-species injustice, and raise awareness around the intersectional geographies of violence and injustice, is an extremely powerful – potentially transformative - thing to do. In ‘The Dreaded Comparison’, Spiegel (1988, p. 92) touched upon this:

"The realization that the animals we enslave, the animals we turn into things, the animals who slave for us that we might eat some luxury from their bodies, are *alive*, are as possessive of their lives as you or I, this realization would throw a wrench into the system. If this realization were reaches, people would have to change an aspect of their lifestyle. And this is why many people resist rethinking about it, resist questioning the system, and fail to know the obvious. Which greatly pleases the slave-*owners*, those who directly profit from the lives of animals and from our passive and active acceptance of slavery and oppression. For if individuals did question it, and refused to participate any longer, the system would collapse.”

Focusing new CAG research around core concepts and ideologies such as speciesism, carnism and anthroparchy exploring: “how” these intersect with other forms of oppression (sexism, racism, classism); and “where” these manifest themselves in different spaces offer important contribution to knowledge. I’ve taken much satisfaction from focusing my “students” (co-learners) attention to these, and other reflections through in my critical animal geographies class and seeing the impact that this has had (White, 2019b). Each year for example, several students taking the class will go then go vegan, feel empowered to encourage similar similar conversations

in their wider family and friendship groups, and some have also engaged directly with wider expression of trans-species forms of activism and protest (Hinchcliffe and White, forthcoming). To come back to the initial point though: how can we keep pushing back current frontiers of knowledge and understanding about trans-species social and spatial injustices *and communicate these in ways* that make our activism more effective and inclusive, and our arguments more visible and persuasive.

These are just a few considered thoughts and suggestions. Ultimately, as an anarchist geographer I neither desire nor think it possible to point to any pre-determined revolutionary blue-prints or set sail by a singular 'map' to pursuit of Total Liberation praxis. Instead a more open and complex imaginary should come encouraged to come to fore; one coupled with the certainty that we – and our research – have powerful roles to play in bringing forward the emancipatory futures that we hope to see prosper, for all.

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